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historically scientific. This is not to say that these two valuable volumes do not contain a large amount of wheat, but they also contain not a little chaff. Possibly they give us the last word—or the last word worth uttering—upon hypothetical analyses and speculative source criticism, and they mark a distinct advance in the field of philological inquiry. But as an attempt to read objectively the mind of the author and to set forth the content of his book in the light of its immediate purpose and historical environment, they fall far short of the final goal. One doubts whether such a goal could ever be reached by an interpreter who can write that the outcome of the recent world-war is “the greatest fulfillment of the prophecy of the Apocalypse” (p. xv), and that this document “lays down the only true basis for national ethics and international law” (p. xxii).

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF PENANCE IN CHRISTIANITY¹

A field of ecclesiastical history unfamiliar to most students is investigated in these volumes. No extended treatment of the history of penance has hitherto been attempted in English, and the Latin and German treatises we have are defective and out of date. Occasional interest only has been taken in the subject since 1651 when John Morinus published his *Commentarius historicus de disciplina in administratione sacramenti poenitentiae tredecim primis seculis*. Just two centuries later appeared the law-historian Wasserschleben's valuable edition of the *libri poenitentiales*.² Since then the most prominent investigator has been the Catholic Bishop Hermann Joseph Schmitz, whose two volumes constitute a full but fatally biased and unreliable account of the practice of penance in the West.³ The less erudite books of F. Frank (1867) and of J. Tixeront (1914) virtually complete the list of general studies before that of Mr. Watkins. At the same time, a considerable amount of editorial and research work of a fragmentary kind has been done.

Mr. Watkins has had a distinguished career in the Anglican church, is vicar of an Oxford charge, and has previously written on holy matrimony. The present work is the product of the author's “available time

¹ *A History of Penance*. Oscar D. Watkins. New York: Longmans, Green, 1920. 2 vols. xxix+xix+775 pages. \$16.00.

² *Bussordnungen der abendländischen Kirche nebst einer rechtsgeschichtlichen Einleitung*, Halle, 1851.

³ *Die Bussbücher und die Bussdisciplin der Kirche*, Mainz, 1883, and *Die Bussbücher und das kanonische Bussverfahren*, Düsseldorf, 1898.

for a good many years." It surveys the story of Christian penance from the beginnings of the church to the Lateran Council, A.D. 1215. The first volume, dealing with the early period to A.D. 450, comprises nearly two-thirds of the work. The order of treatment is admirably planned for the reader's convenience. Each chapter (with the exception of the review chapters at the end of each volume) deals with a specific period of years, and consists of a selection of documents of the period followed by an interpretation of these sources. Within its limitations this method is very successful.

The work gives evidence of much study and careful reflection, and the author deserves our thanks for a real contribution to a very difficult subject.

As a history of penance, however, the inquiring student will find it not without grave defects. He may not be prepared to concede the point that the whole penance system sprang out of "a commission formally and authoritatively given by our Lord" by which the Apostles were authorized to remit or to retain sins (Vol. I, p. 8). This conception of apostolic authority is fundamental to the whole work. While diversity of practice is recognized, it is all referred to the original authoritative deliverance. From this viewpoint it is unnecessary to think of penance as a part of human history. It is only a part of a closed system. The student may ask: What is penance in the light of the larger history of religion? He finds it in the laws of Manu and the aphorisms of Apastamba, in the records of Babylonish kings and in early tales of the Mabinogion. If he compares the penitential books (which Mr. Watkins rightly regards as determinative of the history of Western penance), with the ancient laws of Ireland, he will discover strange correspondences. The excerpts from the *libri poenitentiales* given by Mr. Watkins seem to be selected for their propriety. The reader would not suspect that the books themselves contain many features that have no recognizable connection with an apostolic commission. They reflect, on the other hand, the customs of the ancient Celtic peoples, and derive some of their materials from the time when Caesar found the druids excommunicating and exiling the enemies of the social order (*de Bell. Gall.* vi. 13), or from the dimmer stages of Aryan primitivity in which taboos and penalties for defilement were the recognized laws of life. (See e.g., the *Canones Adamnani* and parts of the *Poenitentiale Cummeani* in Wasserschleben.) Why, to take a pointed instance of primitive survival, do canons in the *Excerpta* from the Book of St. David and in the *Prefatio Gildae*, for an offence related to primitive sex taboo

command the singing of Psalms, while the *Dharmasastra* of Gautama, for the same offence, order the recitation of verses? Or, to cite a more familiar example, what is the historic relationship between the practice of composition in money for assigned penance, and the same practice in Irish, Welsh, and Anglo-Saxon law for crimes of violence? The *Canones Hibernenses* and later Celtic documents might have helped to explain this. But along with the *genuine* Canons of St. Patrick and the important *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* (c. 700 A.D.) they are not represented in the selection of documents. How, again, is this Composition System in Celtic penance related to the Indulgence System of the late Middle Ages? To all such carnal questionings Mr. Watkins offers no answer. In fact, his book arouses no curiosity in the direction of broad, historical relationships. Once only does he allow himself the pleasure of a suggestive footnote. In discussing from Columban's penitential the custom of giving a meal to the confessor, he remarks "a curious parallel to Hindu practice"; but curiosity is led no farther.

Probably no two investigators would have agreed as to the documents that should be selected to illustrate the many-sided subject of penances, and on the whole, granted the presuppositions of the author, there is little that should provoke objection on this score. Still, the use of the legend of St. John and the Robber from Clem. Alex. as a document of the Apostolic Age (Vol. I, p. 7), and the insertion of canons of the so-called Second Synod of St. Patrick with the date¹ "c. 475" (Vol. II, p. 587)—a document which Bury has shown to be compiled from the acts of seventh-century Irish synods²—are palpable, if minor, blunders. It is certain, too, that many of the judgments of the book will be doubted or challenged. An extraordinary weight is given to the slender evidence for private confession in the West before the penitential books came from the Celtic churches. The treatment of the dismissal of the penitentiary priest at Constantinople is interesting but hardly convincing. On the question of the candor of Haltigar in stating that he had obtained his penitential *ex scrinio Roman(a)e ecclesi(a)e*—from a book-repository of the Roman Church—Mr. Watkins exhibits a beautiful charity. He often takes a doubtful position without the least reference to recent discussions. But in doing this he is keeping strictly in view the designed scope of the book, which is stated in the Preface as "a succession of studies in the primary authorities on the penance of the Christian Church." This enables him to avoid *excursus*

¹ Borrowed from Haddan and Stubbs.

² *Life of St. Patrick*, pp. 238f.

into questions of authenticity, readings, and dates of documents. But it also leaves him rather too independent of recent periodical literature, in which he might have found help and guidance. He has consulted the opinions of Hauck, but he has not utilized the investigations of O. Selbass, A. Lagarde, or H. C. Lea, to say nothing of a large group of Celtic scholars headed by H. d'Arbois de Jubainville.

It would, however, be unfair, by these criticisms, to give an impression that the work is inferior in scholarship. While not truly a history of penance it is the most useful contribution to the subject since *Wasserschleben*. It is a safe prophecy that, both as a treasury of valuable sources and for the thoughtfulness of its discussions, it will be consulted by generations of students.

There is a good table of contents, a poor index, and no bibliography.

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